



# Social Movements Research and the 'Movement of Movements': Studying Resistance to Neoliberal Globalisation

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## Abstract

This article explores the state of research on the 'movement of movements' against neoliberal globalisation. Starting from a general consideration of the significance of the movement and the difficulties inherent in studying it, it discusses the literature on the movement from within social movement studies, and argues that the response from social movement researchers falls short of what could be expected in terms of adequacy to the movement and its own knowledge production. It explores some effects of this failure and locates the reasons for it in the unacknowledged relationship between social movements theorising and activist theorising. The article then discusses the possible contributions that can be made by Marxist and other engaged academic writers, as well as the significance of the extensive theoretical literature generated by activists within the movement. It concludes by stating the importance of dialogue between activist and academic theorising and research in attempting to understand the movement.

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## Introduction: Talking about a revolution

### *The global significance of the movement of movements*

The global 'movement of movements' against neoliberal capitalism (variously described as the alter-globalisation, anti-capitalist or global justice movements) is arguably one of the most important historical events of the early 21st century. Macro-level events such as global opposition to the war in Iraq, the 'pink tide' in Latin America, the collapse of the Multilateral Agreement on Investments and successive World Trade Organisation rounds since Seattle mark the tip of the iceberg of a much deeper and longer-lasting process: of popular resistance to specific neoliberal policies, of the coming together of multiple locally based campaigns into transnational networks around specific issues and of the development of an array of summit protests, social fora, alternative

media and other sites contesting the legitimacy of the New World Order.

The nearest points of comparison to this 'movement wave' are probably the 'anti-systemic movements' (Arrighi et al. 1989) or 'world-historical moments' (Katsiaficas 1987) of earlier generations: the movements of 1968 (Fraser 1988); the European resistance to fascism; the 'red mirage' of the years 1916–1923 (Mitchell 1970); the general escalation in labour mobilisation from the 1890s to 1945 (Halperin 2004; Silver 2003); Asian and African anti-colonialism in the same period; the movements of 1848 (Evans and von Strandmann 2000); or, going further back still, the 'Atlantic revolutions' of the late 18th century (Palmer 1964) – periods when multiple regional struggles against dispossession and exploitation and for popular self-government and the priority of human needs came together in an uneven but (at least to some extent) system-spanning resistance to the processes of the capitalist world system (Rediker and Linebaugh 2000). To map such periods in retrospect is a massive challenge, and it is no surprise that it is even harder to do *in media res*: the best empirical overviews, those of Polet/CETRI (2004, 2005), are collections of essays rather than systematic analyses.

### *Media responses to the movement*

This points to a crucial difficulty, that of grasping and imagining processes that happen at such speed and on such a large scale – and whose central structures are organised neither by states nor by corporations. This difficulty is exacerbated by the incapacity of mainstream media to report on the movement with any degree of accuracy or understanding (see, for example, Ytterstad 2004 on Göteborg; O'Carroll 2001 on Genoa; or Browne 2004 on Dublin). Journalistic routine alone means that most everyday information on the movement is processed through the eyes of political leaders and experts, police spokespersons and cultural commentators – and hence fragmented, trivialised or reduced to very specific manifestations.

A partial exception can be made for some movement-linked media: in Europe, for example, the surviving papers from the post-68 movement wave (notably *Le Monde Diplomatique*, which played a key role in the foundation of ATTAC [Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions to Aid Citizens] and the Italian *Il manifesto*, but also the Norwegian *Klassekampen* or the German *die tageszeitung*) are capable of sporadic bursts of interest and exploration (as is the British *Guardian*). More recent foundations, notably the global Indymedia network, formed out of the Seattle protests, demonstrate that it is not impossible to report on the 'movement of movements' intelligently. Even for these media, however, it remains easier to report on the issues the movement is mobilising around, and its effects on states and corporations, than on the movement itself.

*Academic responses to the movement*

This, of course, is where academia, with its combination of resources, shielding from day-to-day pressures, and theoretical commitment to understanding and analysis, should play a role. Unfortunately, however, the bulk of the academic literature has not been grounded in an in-depth empirical engagement with the movement; hence, it necessarily represents an attempt to reassert pre-existing modes of discourse, lightly peppered with empirical examples that are selected for their convenience to this task rather than their significance or otherwise within the movement as a whole.

Thus, Castells (1998), taking the concept of 'social movement' for granted, throws in a handful of examples to illustrate his notion of the 'power of identity' within the world system. Kiely (2005) relegates the actual institutions and practices of the movement to second place in his rush to assess whether globalisation is, or is not, a good thing (predictably, he opts for a 'third way'). Starr (2000) does much the same, although her empirical base is slightly stronger (English-language websites) – contrasting reformists and revolutionaries, she opts for 'decoupling' strategies. The academic machine that churns out text by the yard celebrating civil society and NGOs continues to do so (see, for example, Kaldor et al. 2007 and previous years). Elsewhere, pressures to publish lead to the production of books such as Cohen and Rai (2000), which uses the language of 'social movements' while making virtually no reference to that literature.

Within academia, then, the dominant response has been that of routine science – rather than seeking to learn from the new developments of the movement, to cherry-pick suitable examples and deploy them out of context in support of analyses formed in the period of neoliberal domination and movement defeat that lasted from the early 1970s to the late 1990s. Cultural capital is precious, and it is of course easier to attempt to commodify new developments within existing languages than to abandon existing 'fixed capital' and attempt – to put it bluntly – to *learn* anything from the extraordinary upsurge of creative human practice around the world.

A deeper critique might say something more: that the disciplinary and subdisciplinary boxes of academia represent a reification and, ultimately, a taking for granted of a particular social order: not simply the world system of patriarchal capitalism in general, but the particular institutional and cultural forms it has taken since the defeat of the movements of the 1960s, the imposition of neoliberal hegemony in the 1970s and 1980s and the construction of the New World Order in the 1990s.

What the 'movement of movements' seeks to do in opposing the process of neoliberal globalisation is, precisely, to challenge and remake the same forms and institutions that the literature takes as its parameters and axioms. By its own bottom-up construction of alternative structures, media and ways of being, it also poses an *implicit* challenge to the world as represented through academic eyes. It is unsurprising, then, that the primary academic

response is one of reasserting the primacy of existing, top-down knowledge (even when this comes with a rhetorical appeal to newness that chimes with the 'creative destruction' of capitalist normality (Berman 1983)).

This review offers a critical overview both of what academic social movement studies has to offer on the movement and of what alternative perspectives are available, either in the form of 'frozen' movement theorising within the academy or in the form of contemporary activist theorising, for developing more adequate accounts. Within this overall narrative, it attempts to identify different types of writing, institutional bases and theoretical or disciplinary traditions as a way of mapping out the landscape for readers wishing to explore this literature. Finally, it calls for greater dialogue and collaboration between activist and academic forms of theory and research around the movement of movements, and offers some contemporary examples.

## **Social movement studies and the movement of movements**

### *Writing the movement*

Where, then, should readers start? The empirical and conceptual challenges mentioned above mean that general writing on the movement of movements by activists, journalists and non-specialist academics is dominated by relatively loosely edited collections such as Schalit (2002), Shepard and Hayduk (2002), Notes from Nowhere (2003), Mertes (2004) or Solnit (2004), by unsystematic single-author compilations of notes (e.g. Cockburn et al. 2000; Kingsnorth 2004; Klein 2002; Neale 2002; Starhawk 2002) and the odd textbook (Tormey 2004). In the nature of things, these serve primarily as overviews: helpful to readers who need basic familiarisation with some key events, movements and issues, but offering little beyond this. There are of course some excellent single-country accounts (for example, Gordon and Chatterton 2003 or Colectivo Situaciones 2003 on Argentina).

As monographs, Brecher et al. (2000), George (2004) and Starr (2005) offer more systematic introductions to the internal politics of the movement, while Mayo (2005) offers an introduction to some key concepts and a series of case studies. Mention should also be made of Amoores' (2005) reader, which offers a rather strange combination of theoretical excerpts on 'resistance', texts by non-specialist academics and texts by movement celebrities. What all of these texts lack, however, is a serious attempt to locate the movement in terms of social movement process and historical context.

A certain amount has been written on forerunners to the movement, such as the accounts of 1990s activist life by Cox (1999) and Ryan (2006), and histories of earlier resistance to the International Monetary Fund/World Bank 'structural adjustment policies' (Walton and Seddon 1994) or to 'restructuring' in Europe (Abramsky 2001). What is as yet lacking, however, is any account of these immediate forerunners that extends into the present and shows their connections, although Nilsen's (2006) work

on the Narmada Bachao Andolan makes some steps in this direction and works, such as the dictionary of Adamovsky (2004) or Lowes (2006), make some of the connections with earlier social movements.

### *Researching the movement*

Formal social movements research has so far had relatively little to say about the movement of movements, and again has rested largely on edited collections such as Hamel et al. (2001) or della Porta and Tarrow (2005) (with sporadic mentions of the subject in the two main English-language journals, *Mobilization* and *Social Movement Studies*). The general tendency in these contexts is to fall into the previously mentioned trap of reasserting existing modes of 'routine science' as a sufficient analytical framework. The dominant mode of analysis is an exploration of 'global movements' and 'transnational movement networks' – which is certainly not incorrect as far as it goes, but misses two crucial points.

One is the *interaction* between such movements and networks that makes up the 'movement of movements' rather than – as this literature has tended to suggest – an essentially fragmented collection of single-issue networks that happen to be organised transnationally, although the work of della Porta (2003, 2007; see also della Porta et al. 2006), in particular, is starting to remedy this weakness, at least in part. The other is the *historicity* of transnational resistance: much of the literature has a wide-eyed sense that movements have never been internationally organised before, but the first international was founded in 1864 (see Sen's (2005) reflections on the comparison). As Rediker and Linebaugh (2000) have shown, even struggles against dispossession in the era of global primitive accumulation were essentially transnational. Olesen's (2005) work on *International Zapatismo*, by contrast, is a genuinely new approach to one part of the puzzle. One other piece worth mentioning in this context include Charlton's (2000) oral history of the Seattle protests, which deserves development on the scale of Fraser's (1988) oral history of 1968.

There are very few research monographs that systematically use social movements theory to understand the movement of movements (Starr 2000, already mentioned, is a partial exception). The most formidable author in the field is certainly della Porta and her collaborators (2006, 2007). This work represents an immense deployment of research effort for what is, to an informed reader, disappointingly little result. There are obvious methodological reasons for this, most notably a positivist conception of research that reproduces a familiar landscape (participants' opinions, the official statements of various organisations and so on). The conclusion of della Porta et al. (2006) notes, for example, that participants in demonstrations identify themselves with 'a movement critical of globalisation', that the activities of transnational movements have expanded from lobbying to protest, that there is a lot of networking going on and that organisations

often have a global definition of their scope (pp. 234–35). The result, in other words, is often an elaborate description of the familiar.

Another way of putting this is to say that, as with other work in this vein, it stands at a considerable distance from the theories of the movements themselves and (while they draw on it in unacknowledged ways) fail to pay serious attention to movement theorising as a valid source of knowledge – while conclusions such as della Porta's represent the empirical starting point of most activists' thinking.

### *Weaknesses with the social movement perspective*

These weaknesses would not matter if it were not that the creative action, and developing self-understandings, of the movement itself (i.e. what it does and what it says) are the necessary point of departure for an adequate analysis; when the social movements literature fails to engage adequately with this, it is failing in ways that would be unusual elsewhere in the field. What are the reasons for this inability to analyse the movement of movements *as a social movement*?

The single most important one is undoubtedly social movement theory's tendency to an institutional–political reductionism (Cox 1999; Mayer 1995; Perrow 1979; Piven and Cloward 1995), which has led it to largely abandon the path of tracing movement development back to the conflicts generated within the lifeworld by power, exploitation and ideology and from there 'upwards' in the creative production of new forms of organisation and expression (Lebowitz 2003; Thompson 1963; a brave and largely isolated follow-up was the Edge Hill-based Social Movements Research Group's conference on 'Social movements and the British Marxist Historians').

Instead, movements are typically understood as a particular 'level' of the political system, with both their roots in these everyday needs and pressures and their branches – in political parties, trade unions, churches and other longer-lasting institutions – ruled out as *a priori* irrelevant. It is not accidental that this approach goes hand in hand with a systematic downplaying of social class, and the exclusion of socialist, communist and labour movements from routine consideration – or the exclusion of Marxism from social movement studies. As Jones (1993) put it, social movements theory is essentially a theory of life within North Atlantic Treaty Organization – a point neatly underlined by the fact that the first collection of texts on researching social movements was funded, literally, by North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Diani and Eyerman 1992).

There is an alternative, 'cultural' turn in social movement studies (seen, for example, in Jasper 1997; Johnston and Klandermans 1995; Jordan and Lent 1999; McKay 1996), which has had to let Marxism in through the back door (in the form of a second-hand reception of British cultural studies). All too frequently, however, this has become an alternative top-down perspective, as with the work of Hetherington (2000) on New Age

travellers, which treats them essentially as one lifestyle among many in postmodern capitalism (see Szerszynski 1999 for a critique). McDonald (2006) holds out the promise of developing something more, but collapses into an unsatisfyingly vague theory of everything.

What both of these approaches have in common is a failure to attend to the collective action of *elites*, which in the nature of things is typically both more powerful and more sustained than that of popular classes and subaltern social groups. In the case of the movement of movements, this is precisely what the movement is targeting: the systematic, organised construction of the neoliberal project as a hegemonic force in global economic, political and cultural life. Essential to the movement's action is the understanding that neoliberalism is not just a fact of life but a choice, formed by the political project of coordinated elites – and hence subject to challenge.

In this case, the social movements literature systematically ignores the most basic point of activist theorising. Elsewhere, it draws on it in unacknowledged ways (movement theory and practice is, after all, the ultimate raw material of social movements research) or isolates it as ideology to be studied as if it had no purchase on reality. What these different modes of response underline is the unequal relationship between activist and academic forms of movement theorising (Barker and Cox 2002): the social movements literature in its academic form may *exploit* activist theorising (while claiming the credit for itself), *suppress* it (when it challenges the definition of the 'field' that the literature ultimately seeks to assert), or *stigmatise* it as 'ideology' (rather than analysis grounded in practical experience). Even when challenged in its own terrain (e.g. by Croteau et al. 2005, which makes many of these points in the strategic location of the University of Minnesota Press's series on *Social Movements, Protest and Contention*), the critique is heard, and then ignored in practice as researchers return to 'business as usual'.

What the literature appears incapable of doing, then, is recognising activist theorising as *equal*. To do so, of course, would raise awkward questions of other kinds. Activist theorising, true, is not always subject to peer review prior to publication. But it is most definitely subject to peer review *after* publication – and peer review that brings together a far broader range of empirical experience and points of view than are found in any academic journal. It is also subject to the test of practice: whether it *works* to bring together an action, a campaign or a network – or to win battles, large and small, against its opponents and convince the as yet unmobilised and unradicalised.

As Bevington and Dixon have observed (2005), activists tend to repay this disdain by comprehensively ignoring the social movements literature. When they do read academic literature, they read literature on the issues they organise around, on social structure, or on elite politics; or they read the history of past movement struggles. Which, of course, raises an interesting question about the literature: if it is not of interest to practitioners, who is it of interest to?

It should be acknowledged that many of these weaknesses are specific to the English-language world that has dominated the construction of 'social movement studies' as a field. Beyond the specific intellectual histories that are of course important (see, for example, the useful comments in the introduction to Shukaitis and Graeber 2007), a key factor here must be the relative weakness and isolation of the movement of movements in the USA and Britain. A glance at the broader Italian literature, for example, demonstrates a far greater degree of communication between activist and academic theorising (see, for example, Bertinotti 2001; Caracciolo 2001; Castellina 2003; Curcio 2006; Pianta 2001; Ruggiero 2001; Sansonetti 2002). This bears fruit in an ability to analyse the process and organisation of the movement and identify their historically specific qualities without either assuming a total, postmodern newness or asserting the timeless positivism of eternal theories of institutions. Unsurprisingly, this literature is also far stronger on the strategic question of what activists should do if they want to win. No doubt similar points could be made about the Spanish- or French-language literature among others (see Faschingeder et al. 2003; Shahyar and Wahl 2005 for German examples).

### *Shadow debates and missing debates*

The static nature of the existing literature, and its tendency to emphasise its authors' cultural capital, means that to a large extent real debate is absent. There are certainly shadow debates, as, for example, between those whose prior commitments are postmodernist and those whose prior commitments are Marxist, or as between those who assume that the movement is a more or less amorphous or structurally determined response to the 'real world' and those who see movements in institutional and organisational terms – but in virtually all cases these are *a priori*, rarely debated except in the most rhetorical terms. A similar situation exists in relation to the movement's relationship to state power, and the specific case of violence, although the *a priori* here have to do with institutional and political positions rather than theoretical capital.

What is missing is a strong sense of process: of how movements develop through the fusion of people's attempts to meet their local needs and organise around their particular issues, via collective processes of learning through struggle at many levels. The literature equally lacks a sense of elite agency: a real sense of neoliberalism as an organised, intentional and reversible process that both produces resistance (globally) and mirrors the organisation of that resistance. Finally, most of it lacks any real historical perspective that could set the current movement wave in relation to those of earlier centuries. We now set out to survey some of the strands of theory that can be brought together in an approach that seeks to address these weaknesses and in the process engender movement-relevant theory.

## Frozen movement knowledge in the academy and beyond

*Where adequate responses might come from*

Previous waves of movement organising have had their own effects on the academy, typically in constructing interdisciplinary approaches such as Marxism, feminism, black studies, queer studies and so on, around a programmatic refusal to accept the institutionalisation of the current social order as an intellectually defining fact. This means that there is a certain degree of frozen activist theorising within academia; most of this, however, has been notably silent on the 'movement of movements'.

In terms of developing clearer theoretical and analytical understanding of the character and dynamics of collective action of dominant social groups, we can usefully turn to Marxian approaches and studies in political economy and historical sociology. The most recent example of analyses of this kind is the work of David Harvey (2003, 2005, 2006), which has provided a pointed analysis of neoliberalism as a strategy for the restoration of class power in the context of the crisis of organised capitalism.

Displaying a close family resemblance to this analysis of neoliberalism is of course the studies of the epochal shift in from the Fordism and Keynesianism of organised capitalism to the current neoliberal accumulation strategy found in the work of Offe (1985), Lash and Urry (1987), Arrighi (1994) and Harvey (1990), as well as in the work of the French Regulation school (e.g. Lipietz 1987). Neo-Gramscian perspectives in international relations similarly hold rich insights on the dynamics of the neoliberal turn (e.g. Overbeek 1990, 1993). The global dimension of this shift has been theorised by Robinson (2004) and Sklair (2002), among others.

There is a rich body of work, also located within neo-Gramscian international relations theory, which deciphers the workings of elite collective action during the era of organised capitalism, and especially the era after World War II (e.g. Gill 1990; van Der Pijl 1984). In economics, this era has also been scrutinised by Mandel (1978) and Armstrong et al. (1984). An even wider historical scope, delineating the dynamics of collective action from above across epochs of capitalist development can be found in the work of van Der Pijl (1998), Silver (2003), Silver and Slater (1999) and Halperin (2004). Eschle and Maiguscha (2005) attempts to relate some of this literature directly to the movement of movements.

A handful of authors can be said to engage with the movement of movements from these broader, politically engaged academic perspectives. Bircham and Charlton (2001) is essentially descriptive; McNally (2006) is primarily a critique of globalisation bracketed by a few comments on the movement; Naples and Desai (2002) is an edited collection about single movements rather than about their cooperation (a serious study of the relationship of the global women's movement to the movement of

movements is badly needed); Evans (2005) attempts to locate the movement within a political economy perspective; and Zackariasson (2006) explores the movement's attraction for young people. Finally, Chesters and Welsh (2006) offers an interesting analysis of identities and networks within the developing movement as a 'non-manifesto' exploring emergent forms of order 'at the edge of chaos'.

The most systematic approach to date, however, is *Multitude* (Hardt and Negri 2004). This is probably the single best academic book on the movement – comparable, in some ways, to Touraine's (1972) analysis of 1968 – in that it is unafraid to raise theoretical questions that go beyond disciplinary boundaries and is grounded in a practical understanding and involvement in the movement (Negri and Cocco 2006 develops the analysis further in relation to Latin America). Where *Empire* (Hardt and Negri 2000), largely written prior to the movement's full emergence in the North, essentially recycled autonomist theory in ways that undermined the possibility either of any *organised* collective action or of any real dialogue between theory and practice (Cox 2001), *Multitude* offers a much greater connection between everyday human agency and the emergence of the 'movement of movements', set within the context of a broad analysis of the nature of contemporary power relations and the crisis of the New World Order. It is these kinds of large-scale links and relationships that have to be explored seriously by any research that does not want to assume in advance that its subjects are misguided in their sense of the possibility of transformation and the relevance of their struggles to those who are not yet organised.

Other relevant work in this mould has come from the sociology of revolutions – notably Holloway (2005) and the 'structured conversation' in Foran (2003), both of which pay sustained attention to aspects at least of the movement of movements. Holloway's work, despite its difficulty, has been extensively discussed within the movement – along with Hardt and Negri it is probably one of the few texts written by professional academics that significant numbers of activists are familiar with. As with Hardt and Negri, it asks about the nature of everyday life in capitalism, and the ways in which resistance develops from the micro- to the macro-scale, proposing an ultimately optimistic analysis of the ever-present possibility of transformation along with a profound skepticism as to traditional understandings of what this might mean: hence, the title *Change the World Without Taking Power*.

These questions are also tackled, in more empirically grounded but necessarily more fragmented ways, in Foran's work, which brings together sociologists of revolution in a structured reflection on the meaning of 'revolution' in the present day. In works such as these, powerful intellectual resources are unlocked within the academy in response to the movement of movements, in ways that have something to offer to activists and academics alike. The pity is that such works are so few, and so isolated within academia

by comparison with the conveyor belt of 'routine science'. It has to be added that both Negri and Holloway have themselves been intimately involved in debates within the movements, at World Social Fora and elsewhere, while to the best of my knowledge social movement studies has roundly ignored their work.

### *Activist theorising*

To turn from academic social movements research to the activist literature on the movement of movements is to move from an embarrassing scarcity of substance to an embarrassment of riches. The movement of movements, just as much as its antagonist, the neoliberal project, involves a massive process not just of organising but of theorising practice, and has thrown up whole strata of organic intellectuals and forums for debate.

The primary difficulty here is the sheer scale and diversity of activist theorisations of the movement. In the nature of things much of this is tied to particular projects, struggles and events that require empirical assimilation before the texts can be understood; it exists at every level of immediacy or abstraction; it is formulated in dozens of different languages, from Spanish to Indonesian; and exists in a similar multitude of forms, from pamphlets and stories via websites, discussion lists and recorded talks to edited collections and journals.

Perhaps most importantly, it is largely collective, and largely practical: while there are well-known spokespeople, their primary task is external, in raising awareness of the issues, challenging the authorities and celebrating alternative institutions. The elaboration of analysis of what the movement is, is primarily carried out in discussing 'what should we do, and how?' – in committees, in public meetings, in email exchanges and in the more indirect processes of invitation and acceptance, setting themes and challenging processes. Rather than indicate 'key texts' where few or none exist, then, what can be done is to point towards a selection of sites of substantial theoretical discussion.

One of the key sites of debate has been in the literature generated around the World Social Fora (e.g. Sen and Waterman 2003; Sen 2004; see also de Sousa Santos 2003), paralleled in Europe by the formation of the 'European Social Forum memory process' (e.g. Euromovements 2007), De Sousa Santos (2006), which draws substantially on his own work within World Social Fora structures, is an illuminating example of the kinds of issues tackled in the process of constructing a 'counter-hegemonic globalisation', not least the epistemological ones: the movement of movements needs to translate both between the different kinds of knowledges represented by different movements and between their different kinds of actions (p. 131). It also needs to tackle the 'sociology of emergences' (p. 29): what is possible, what exists as potential, and what can be done to bring these into existence.

Debates around the Social Fora in turn link into the work of movement think-tanks and research institutes such as the India Institute for Critical Action: Centre in Movement (CACIM 2007) and the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam (TNI 2007), respectively. More generally, summit protests have typically generated their own publications bringing together debates over direction, such as Yuen (2001, 2004), *On Fire: The Battle of Genoa and the Anti-Capitalist Movement* (2001) or Harvie (2005), as well as internal critiques (e.g. Colours of Resistance n.d.).

A separate set of debates have been and are carried on within the various parts of the movement, most importantly among anarchist and Trotskyist groups (e.g. Dee 2004 or Giovannini 2001); within the trade union movement (e.g. Aguiton 2001 or Global Solidarity Dialogue 2001); within the radical ecology movement (e.g. Do or Die! 2006) and groups like ATTAC (Shahyar and Wahl 2005); and no doubt elsewhere. The People's Global Action network and the Zapatistas have both been active in generating theory (e.g. Marcos 2006) and promoting dialogue of many different kinds (e.g. People's Global Action Women 2001).

Lastly, a range of programmatically international, usually Web-based, periodicals aim to combine reporting on issues and events with developing dialogue within the movement; good examples are *The Commoner* (2006), *Z Magazine* (2007), *Red Pepper* (2007) and of course Indymedia (2007). A wide range of more idiosyncratic individual dialogues exist around the edges of the movement; compare, for example, *Cyberjournal* (2007) and *BLUE* magazine (2007).

Most recently, *Turbulence* (2007) has brought together a range of activist researchers and groups to debate the question 'what does it mean to win?' The theme highlights one of the major topics within the movement (here answered largely from autonomist and related perspectives) – not 'how can we win?', but 'what does power consist of', 'what does it look like when popular groups do in fact take back some degree of control', and 'what are our strategic orientations?' One of the things that stands out most strongly, from this as from other comparable debates, is the sheer diversity of voices, and the complexity of constructing a real dialogue between so many different intellectual and political traditions, each grounded in specific local cultures and immediate problematics.

## **Conclusion: Beyond the fragments**

Given the scale and diversity of the movement, it is likely that for some considerable time to come serious work will remain primarily a matter of such dialogues and 'translations', as de Sousa Santos puts it. The proliferation of events, organisations and ideas remains far beyond the grasp of single individuals. Along with the dialogues already discussed, the most promising sites for intellectual creativity are those that represent dialogues between activist and academic theorising, typically on an interdisciplinary basis.

Fuster Morell has developed an interesting typology of the relationship between these different forms of movement research and theorising (2005).

Her own work, together with that of her colleagues in the *Investigació* group in Barcelona (*Col·lectiu Investigació* 2005) and the *Euromovements* project (*Guide for Social Transformation in Europe* 2005), represents one example of the type of development that is now becoming important. A second is represented by the annual publications of the *Alternative Futures and Popular Protest* conference in Manchester (e.g. Barker and Tyldesley 2006 and previous years' volumes), and by email lists such as the social movements discussion forum (*Social Movements* 2007). A third is represented by joint knowledge projects such as Ken Cole's adult education work with South African trade unionists and the engaged research programmes of groups like the *Networked Politics* process (2007) developed by the *Transform!* network and others. All of these, however, represent the tip of an iceberg of projects such as this being developed around the world in a hundred different institutional locations: examples of what the future might hold, rather than definitive statements of where we are now.

Wainwright, in an important contribution to the sociology of movement knowledge (1994), has written about how the everyday practice of people in struggle contributes to the construction of alternative forms of knowledge from below, which later becomes formalised as academic knowledge. This is perhaps too linear a view: while the process is real, there are powerful constraints within academia (and, more broadly, within capitalism) which mean that these at best represent tenuously held, and often bitterly assaulted, bridgeheads of popular knowledge within hostile institutions, constantly under pressure to become 'more like the other' forms of established knowledge.

Nevertheless, while the movement is strong, it is in this dialogue that the most accessible, and significant, work is likely to be found. The questions it will need to answer include both the traditional focus on everyday organisational activity of academic social movements research (and how such activity is changing) and the larger questions that necessarily exercise activists who feel that, for the moment at least, they can ask larger questions – about whether they can transform or overthrow major power structures, what it would mean to do so, and how (if successful) they might construct 'another world' in a dialogue not between structurally similar elites but between so many different kinds of movement, with so many different ways of thinking and talking. For now at least, the process of theorising the movement will necessarily remain a rich, multilingual conversation.

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## Short Biographies

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Alf Gunvald Nilsen is RCUK Fellow at the Centre for the Study of Social and Global Justice at the School of Politics and International Relations, University of Nottingham. His research focuses on popular resistance to neoliberal globalization in India and the global South more generally, as well as theoretical and methodological issues related to social movement research. He is currently working on a monograph on the Narmada anti-dam movement, as well as a book-length study of 'the movement of movements' with Laurence Cox and Sara Motta.

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